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Nikolai A. Zarkevich

*Ames Laboratory, [zarkev@ameslab.gov](mailto:zarkev@ameslab.gov)*

Hao Chen

*Iowa State University, [haochen@iastate.edu](mailto:haochen@iastate.edu)*

Valery I. Levitas

*Iowa State University and Ames Laboratory, [vlevitas@iastate.edu](mailto:vlevitas@iastate.edu)*

Duane D. Johnson

*Iowa State University, [ddj@iastate.edu](mailto:ddj@iastate.edu)*

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## Abstract

The density functional theory was employed to study the stress-strain behavior and elastic instabilities during the solid-solid phase transformation (PT) when subjected to a general stress tensor, as exemplified for semiconducting Si I and metallic Si II, where metallization precedes the PT, so stressed Si I can be a metal. The hydrostatic PT occurs at 76 GPa, while under uniaxial loading it is 11 GPa (3.7 GPa mean pressure), 21 times lower. The Si I  $\rightarrow$  Si II PT is described by a critical value of the phase-field's modified transformation work, and the PT criterion has only two parameters given six independent stress elements. Our findings reveal novel, more practical synthesis routes for new or known high-pressure phases under predictable nonhydrostatic loading, where competition of instabilities can serve for phase selection rather than free energy minima used for equilibrium processing.

## Disciplines

Engineering Physics | Materials Science and Engineering | Metallurgy | Structural Materials

## Comments

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# Lattice Instability during Solid-Solid Structural Transformations under a General Applied Stress Tensor: Example of Si I $\rightarrow$ Si II with Metallization

Nikolai A. Zarkevich,<sup>1,\*</sup> Hao Chen,<sup>2,†</sup> Valery I. Levitas,<sup>1,2,3,4,‡</sup> and Duane D. Johnson<sup>1,4,§</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Ames Laboratory, U.S. Department of Energy, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011-3020, USA*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Aerospace Engineering, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011, USA*

<sup>3</sup>*Department of Mechanical Engineering, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011, USA*

<sup>4</sup>*Department of Materials Science and Engineering, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011, USA*



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The density functional theory was employed to study the stress-strain behavior and elastic instabilities during the solid-solid phase transformation (PT) when subjected to a general stress tensor, as exemplified for semiconducting Si I and metallic Si II, where metallization precedes the PT, so stressed Si I can be a metal. The hydrostatic PT occurs at 76 GPa, while under uniaxial loading it is 11 GPa (3.7 GPa mean pressure), 21 times lower. The Si I  $\rightarrow$  Si II PT is described by a critical value of the phase-field's modified transformation work, and the PT criterion has only two parameters given six independent stress elements. Our findings reveal novel, more practical synthesis routes for new or known high-pressure phases under predictable nonhydrostatic loading, where competition of instabilities can serve for phase selection rather than free energy minima used for equilibrium processing.

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Phase transformations (PTs) in solids are mostly characterized by equilibrium phase diagrams [1], whereas general nonhydrostatic stresses offer novel synthetic routes for new or known high-pressure phases. Here we augment temperature-pressure ( $T - P$ ) equilibrium diagrams by a stress ( $\sigma$ ) tensor that affects structural (and electronic) instabilities, providing guidance for creating more accessible processing routes of such phases under predictable nonhydrostatic deformation at significantly lower mean pressures. Indeed, observed PTs occur under a significant deviation from equilibrium [2–5], with large hysteresis. For carbon, the graphite-diamond PT at room temperature occurs at 2.45 GPa; however, due to hysteresis, the PT is observed at 70 GPa [3]. The actual PT pressure deviates from that of equilibrium due to an enthalpy barrier. When thermal fluctuations can be neglected, the PT criterion is related to disappearance of the enthalpy barrier, i.e., to the lattice instability. Hence, lattice instability conditions are necessarily studied under hydrostatic, uniaxial, and multi-axial loadings [6–12].

In experiments, a significant reduction in PT pressure occurs due to deviatoric (nonhydrostatic) stresses and plastic strains [5,13–16]. For example, plastic shear reduces the PT from hexagonal to superhard wurtzitic BN from 52.8 to 6.7 GPa [5]—an order of magnitude. This phenomenon is extremely important from fundamental and applied points of view, as it may reduce the PT pressure to a practical level for high-pressure phases that exhibit unique properties.

The suggested physical mechanism responsible for this reduction is related to dislocation pileups associated with a

plastic strain [13]. As stresses at the tip of a pileup are proportional to the number of dislocations in a pileup (typically 10–100), local stresses exceed the lattice instability limit and cause the nucleation of a high-pressure phase even at a relatively small external pressure. This was rationalized based on an analytical model [13] and using a phase-field approach [17,18]. However, the phase-field inputs for the PT instability criteria for an ideal crystal under a *general stress tensor* were assumed hypothetically, as such criteria are not known for any material [19].

Because of the technological importance of Si and its PTs, a huge literature exists. Relevant are the PTs in Si I under hydrostatic and two-parametric nonhydrostatic loadings, studied with the density functional theory (DFT) [20,21], and the lattice instability under two-parametric loadings (unrelated to a PT) [10,22–24].

So, we perform a DFT study of the deformation process under an applied *general stress* and determine the lattice instabilities responsible for the cubic-to-tetragonal Si I  $\rightarrow$  Si II PT, along with metallization that can occur prior to the Si II phase. While finding the instability criteria under all six stress components seems daunting, due to the large number of combinations, unexpected guidance came from the crystal lattice instability criterion formulated within the phase-field method [11,12,25,26]. The key result is that Si I  $\rightarrow$  Si II PT can be described by the critical value of the modified transformation work. With normal stresses ( $\sigma_1$ ,  $\sigma_2$ ,  $\sigma_3$ ) acting along  $\langle 110 \rangle$ ,  $\langle 1\bar{1}0 \rangle$ , and  $\langle 001 \rangle$ , respectively, the PT criterion is linear in normal stresses, depends on  $\sigma_1 + \sigma_2$ , is independent of  $\sigma_1 - \sigma_2$  and shear stress  $\tau_{21}$ , acting alone or with one more shear stress, and depends on

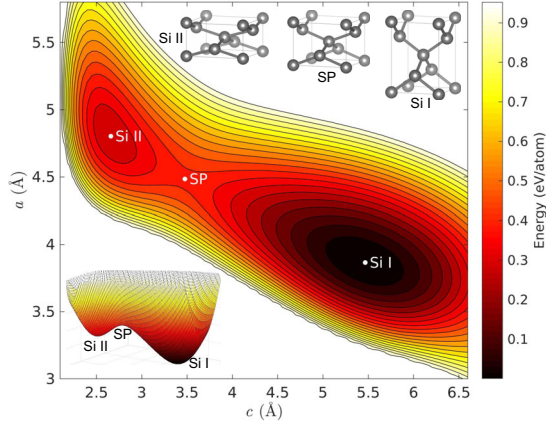


FIG. 1. DFT energy of Si versus lattice parameters  $c$  and  $a$ . Insets: Tetragonal ( $a = b$ ,  $c$ ) unit cells for stress-free Si II (left), unstable SP (middle), and Si I (right).

all shear stresses via theoretically predicted geometric nonlinearity. The PT criterion has only two material parameters for a general applied stress, which can be determined by two DFT simulations under different normal stresses.

**Energy landscape.**—The DFT potential energy (versus lattice constants  $a_i = b_i$  and  $c_i$ ) is given in Fig. 1; the data are in Supplemental Material [27]. We find two local energy minima, corresponding to the fully relaxed (stress-free) Si I and Si II, and a saddle point (SP)—the unstable state corresponding to the enthalpy barrier (Fig. 1). The tetragonal cell of Si I is bounded by (110), ( $\bar{1}\bar{1}0$ ), and (001) planes. The DFT energies and lattice constants relative to the stress-free Si I ( $a_1 = 3.8653$  Å,  $c_1 = \sqrt{2}a_1 = 5.4665$  Å) are 0.2949 eV/atom for Si II ( $a_2 = 4.8030$  Å,  $c_2 = 2.6592$  Å) and 0.4192 eV/atom for the SP state ( $a = 4.4847$  Å,  $c = 3.4763$  Å). The calculated  $c_1$  is +0.7% of the experiment (5.43 Å) [40].

We designate tensors with boldface; e.g.,  $\mathbf{I}$  is the unit tensor. Contractions of tensors  $\mathbf{A} = \{A_{ij}\}$  and  $\mathbf{B} = \{B_{jk}\}$  over one and two indices in Einstein notations are  $\mathbf{A} \cdot \mathbf{B} = \{A_{ij}B_{jk}\}$  and  $\mathbf{A}:\mathbf{B} = A_{ij}B_{ji}$ , respectively. The inverse and transpose of  $\mathbf{A}$  are  $\mathbf{A}^{-1}$  and  $\mathbf{A}^T$ , respectively.

**Deformation gradient.**— $\mathbf{F} = \mathbf{F}_e \cdot \mathbf{U}_t$ , mapping an undeformed state of a crystal into a deformed state, is decomposed into elastic  $\mathbf{F}_e$  and transformational  $\mathbf{U}_t$  parts. Deformation gradient  $\mathbf{U}_t$  changes the Si I stress-free cell to the Si II stress-free cell; its diagonal components are  $U_{11} = U_{22} = a_2/a_1 = 1.243$  and  $U_{33} = c_2/c_1 = 0.486$ . For a Tersoff potential [11,12], it is quite different:  $U_{11} = U_{22} = 1.175$  and  $U_{33} = 0.553$ . We label tetragonal directions  $a = b$  and  $c$  by indices 1, 2, and 3. We use true Cauchy stress  $\boldsymbol{\sigma}$  (force per unit deformed area) and Lagrangian strain  $\mathbf{E} = \frac{1}{2}(\mathbf{F}^T \cdot \mathbf{F} - \mathbf{I})$ .

**Stress strain.**— $\sigma_3$ - $E_3$  curves for fixed lateral stresses  $\sigma_1 = \sigma_2$  are in Fig. 2, along with corresponding transformation

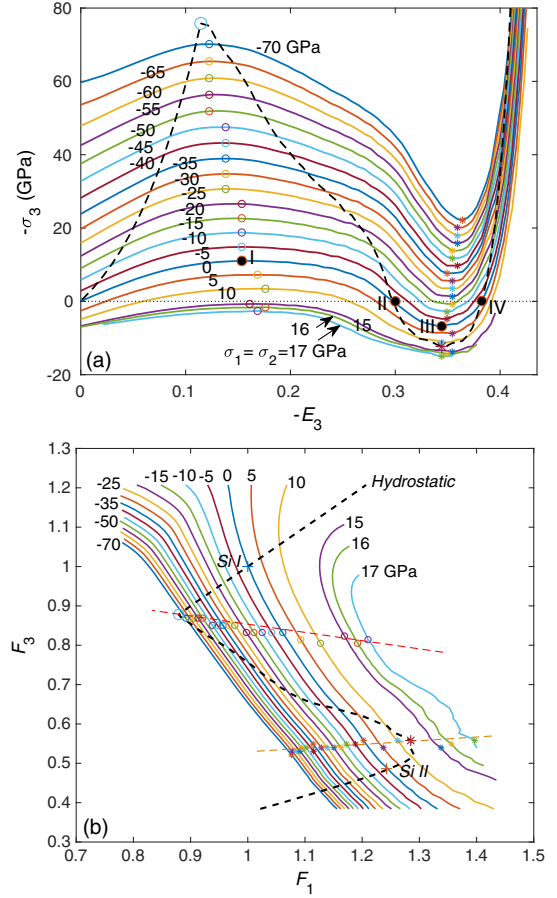


FIG. 2. (a) True (Cauchy) stress  $\sigma_3$  versus Lagrangian strain  $E_3$  for compression or tension along  $c$  for lateral stresses  $\sigma_1 = \sigma_2$  for Si I  $\leftrightarrow$  Si II PTs; (b) corresponding transformation paths in the ( $F_1 = F_2$ ,  $F_3$ ) plane. Hollow (solid) symbols mark instability points for forward (reverse) PT. The dashed line shows hydrostatic loading.

paths in the ( $F_1 = F_2$ ,  $F_3$ ) plane. The elastic instability occurs when the determinant of the elastic moduli tensor, modified by some geometrically nonlinear terms, reduces to zero [6–10]. This results in a condition that some elastic moduli (or combination thereof) reduce to zero. We will use an alternative (more strict) condition: Elastic lattice instability at true stress  $\boldsymbol{\sigma}$  occurs at stresses above (or below for the reverse PT) which the crystal cannot be at equilibrium. Instability points correspond to the stress maximum for forward PT (and minimum for reverse PT) on the stress-strain curves (Fig. 2). Our condition is more general and universal, because it is applicable even to the cases with discontinuous or undefined derivatives of stress with respect to strain.

A tetragonal stressed lattice of Si I transforms into a tetragonal stressed lattice of Si II (Figs. 1 and 2), and the lattice instability does not change this tetragonal symmetry. The slope of the stress-strain curve is continuous and is zero at instability points. Under hydrostatic loading (dashed line in Fig. 2), a cubic lattice loses its stability under tetragonal

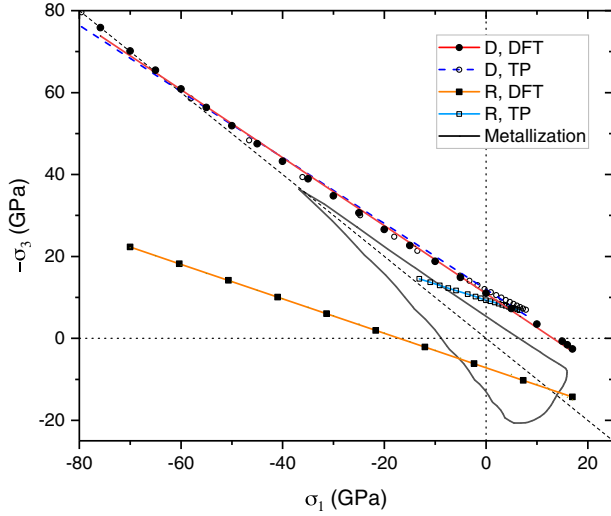


FIG. 3. Elastic instability versus  $\sigma_3$  and  $\sigma_1 = \sigma_2$  for direct ( $D$ ) Si I  $\rightarrow$  Si II and reverse ( $R$ ) Si II  $\rightarrow$  Si I PTs from DFT and TP-based results [11,12] and the metallization curve from DFT. Hydrostatic condition ( $\sigma_1 = \sigma_2 = \sigma_3$ ) is a diagonal (dashed black) line.

perturbations; i.e., there is a bifurcation from a primary isotropic deformation to a secondary tetragonal deformation; hence, the derivative at the hydrostatic instability point is discontinuous. Under both hydrostatic ( $\sigma_1 = \sigma_2 = \sigma_3$ ) and uniaxial ( $\sigma_1 = \sigma_2 = 0$ ) compression, there are three stress-free states (Fig. 1): Si I, Si II (stable or metastable enthalpy minima), and an intermediate unstable state at the SP (enthalpy barrier). Interestingly, a stress-free Si II is metastable with stable phonons [21,41,42]. Thus, one could search for a pressure-plastic shear path for arresting the metastable Si II, as suggested in Ref. [13] for any metastable phase. In experiments, a stress-free Si II was not observed.

**Elastic lattice instability.**—conditions under two-parametric loading at  $\sigma_1 = \sigma_2$  for forward (direct) ( $\sigma_{3d}$ ) and reverse ( $\sigma_{3r}$ ) PTs are approximated by linear relationships in Fig. 3. Tersoff-potential (TP) results from Refs. [11,12] for Si I  $\rightarrow$  Si II PT are generally in good agreement with the present DFT results; however, there is a difference for tensile and small compressive  $\sigma_1$ , where TP results are slightly higher and nonlinear. Under hydrostatic loading, the PT pressure from DFT and TP is 75.81 and 79.58 GPa, respectively.

The PT stress for uniaxial compression is  $-11.03$  GPa ( $\sigma_{3d}$ ) at  $E_3 = -0.154$ . Then the pressure for uniaxial loading is  $-\sigma_{3d}/3 = 3.68$  GPa, which is  $75.81/3.68 = 20.6$  times lower than the hydrostatic case. This characterizes the very strong effect of nonhydrostatic stresses on PT, which can partially explain a scatter in experimental data under quasihydrostatic conditions and a significantly lower experimental PT pressure than the predicted hydrostatic instability pressure. The instability lines are described by  $\sigma_{3d} = -10.9 + 1.20\sigma_1$  for  $\sigma_1 \in [-75.81; 17]$  and  $\sigma_{3r} = 7.175 + 0.4209\sigma_1$  for  $\sigma_1 \in [-70; 17]$ . The theoretical

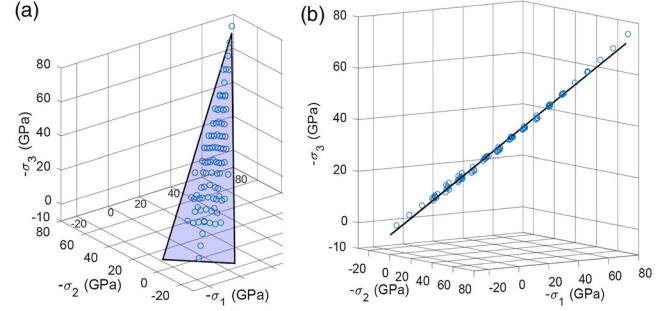


FIG. 4. Criterion for Si I  $\rightarrow$  Si II PT for triaxial stresses. (a) DFT results (points) lie very close to a plane described by a constant value of modified transformation work in Eq. (3). (b) The result in (a) rotated to visualize an approximate plane.

strength is approximately  $\sigma_{3d} = -10.6 + 0.77\sigma_1$  for  $\sigma_1 \in [-15; 12]$ . As it is close to our result, the instability in Ref. [23] is related to Si I  $\rightarrow$  Si II PT.

While the instability line for forward PT, calculated in Refs. [11,12] using TP, is quite close to our DFT results, for reverse PT the TP results are completely different from DFT. Thus, none of the classical potentials in Refs. [11,12] (Tersoff, modified Tersoff, and Stillinger-Weber) are able to describe the reverse PT.

**Metallization.**—This electronic transition from a semi-conducting to a metallic phase (band gap  $\rightarrow$  zero) is caused by deformation of Si I under combinations of  $\sigma_3$  and fixed  $\sigma_1 = \sigma_2$  (Fig. 3). The band gap versus compressive or tensile strain is given in Fig. S2 [27]. The electronic transition is found to precede the structural PT for all combinations of stresses; i.e., a sufficiently deformed Si I under stress is metallic (Fig. 3). This transition does not change the continuity of the stress-strain curves and their first derivatives (Fig. 2); this differs from the stress discontinuity in magnetostructural phase transitions [43]. The metallization curve is closed in the  $(\sigma_3, \sigma_1)$  plane and surrounds the stress-free Si I; it can be approximated by two straight lines  $\sigma_{3m} = -5.605 + 0.8417\sigma_1$  and  $\sigma_{3m} = 13.04 + 1.396\sigma_1$  and a parabolic section  $\sigma_{3m} = 11.95 + 2.378\sigma_1 + 0.16\sigma_1^2$ . While one of the metallization lines is relatively close and approximately parallel to the Si I  $\rightarrow$  Si II PT line, two other lines are deeply in the region of stability of Si I (Fig. 3). Metallization occurs at compressive  $-36.82$  GPa and tensile  $+13.91$  GPa under hydrostatic pressure,  $-5.4$  and  $+12.78$  GPa under uniaxial loading at  $\sigma_1 = \sigma_2 = 0$  and  $-6.69$  and  $+8.79$  GPa under biaxial loading at  $\sigma_3 = 0$ . Hence, the effect of nonhydrostatic stresses is extremely strong.

**Elastic lattice instability under triaxial loading.**—Evidently, DFT results for  $\sigma_1 \neq \sigma_2$  case (Fig. 4) suggest that the criterion for forward Si I  $\rightarrow$  Si II PT is described accurately in 3D space of normal stresses by a plane:

$$\sigma_3 = -9.911 + 0.4145(\sigma_1 + \sigma_2). \quad (1)$$



It is very surprising that the elastic instability for a material with strong physical and geometric nonlinearities can be approximated by a linear criterion.

*Lattice instability under general stress tensor—The phase-field approach.*—As shown in Refs. [11,12,25,26], a PT condition linear in normal stress can be derived by the phase-field approach to martensitic PTs. Using several assumptions, the instability Si I  $\rightarrow$  Si II PT criterion is

$$2W = \boldsymbol{\sigma} : \mathbf{F}_e^{T-1} \cdot \frac{d^2 \bar{\mathbf{U}}_t}{d\eta^2} \Big|_{\eta=0} \cdot \mathbf{F}_e^T \geq 2A, \quad (2)$$

where deformation gradient  $\bar{\mathbf{U}}_t(\eta) \equiv \mathbf{I} + \bar{\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}}_t(\eta)$ , and other material parameters [e.g., elastic moduli and transformation strain  $\bar{\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}}_t(\eta)$ ] depend on the order parameter  $\eta$ , which changes during the transformation process from  $\eta = 0$  for Si I [ $\bar{\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}}_t(0) = \mathbf{0}$ ] to  $\eta = 1$  for Si II [ $\bar{\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}}_t(1) = \boldsymbol{\varepsilon}_t = \text{diag}(\varepsilon_{t1}, \varepsilon_{t1}, \varepsilon_{t3})$ ].  $W$  is called the modified transformation work [11], and  $A$  is the magnitude of the double-well barrier. For a cubic-to-tetragonal transformation,  $[(d^2 \bar{\mathbf{U}}_t)/(d\eta^2)]|_{\eta=0} = 2\text{diag}(b_1\varepsilon_{t1}, b_1\varepsilon_{t1}, b_3\varepsilon_{t3})$ , where  $b_i$  are the coefficients in the interpolation of  $\bar{\boldsymbol{\varepsilon}}_t(\eta)$ . For the loading by three stresses normal to the chosen above faces, all tensors in Eq. (2) are coaxial, tensors  $\mathbf{F}_e^{T-1}$  and  $\mathbf{F}_e^T$  eliminate each other, and Eq. (2) reduces to the linear modified transformation work criterion:

$$W = b_3\sigma_3\varepsilon_{t3} + b_1(\sigma_1 + \sigma_2)\varepsilon_{t1} = A. \quad (3)$$

The equality is used to describe the combination of stresses at the limit of stability and calibrate material parameters.  $W$  reduces to the transformation work for  $b_1 = b_3 = 1$ . The consequence of Eq. (3) for cubic-to-tetragonal PT is that, with  $\varepsilon_{t1} = \varepsilon_{t2}$ , the stresses  $\sigma_1$  and  $\sigma_2$  contribute to the instability criterion via  $\sigma_1 + \sigma_2$ , as in Eq. (1). Comparing Eqs. (3) and (1) with  $\varepsilon_{t1} = U_{t1} - 1 = 0.243$  and  $\varepsilon_{t3} = U_{t3} - 1 = -0.514$  leads to  $A(\theta)/b_3 = 5.094$  GPa and  $b_3/b_1 = 1.141$ .

When shear stresses  $\tau_{ij}$  are applied, causing nonzero deformation gradients  $F_{21}$ ,  $F_{31}$ , and  $F_{32}$ , with rigid-body rotations excluded by imposing a constraint  $F_{12} = F_{13} = F_{23} = 0$ , Eq. (2) reduces to

$$W = b_3\sigma_3\varepsilon_{t3} + b_1(\sigma_1 + \sigma_2)\varepsilon_{t1} + \frac{b_1\varepsilon_{t1} - b_3\varepsilon_{t3}}{F_{11}^e F_{22}^e} [\tau_{32} F_{32}^e F_{11}^e + \tau_{31} (F_{31}^e F_{22}^e - F_{32}^e F_{21}^e)] = A, \quad (4)$$

where  $(b_1\varepsilon_{t1} - b_3\varepsilon_{t3})/A = 0.143$  and the terms proportional to  $\varepsilon_{t2} - \varepsilon_{t1}$  are eliminated. With transformation shears absent in a cubic-to-tetragonal PT, the shear transformation work is absent. The terms proportional to the shear stresses are due to geometric nonlinearity (finite strains); they do not contain any additional material parameters. Shear stresses change the geometry of the

crystal, and this affects transformation work along the normal components of transformation strain.

For the obtained parameters, and because  $F_{ii}^e > 0$  and  $\tau_{ij}F_{ij}^e > 0$ , when  $\tau_{32}$  and  $F_{32}^e$  or  $\tau_{31}$  and  $F_{31}^e$  are applied alone, the contribution of shear stresses to  $W$  is positive; i.e., they promote tetragonal instabilities. Shear stress  $\tau_{21}$  (more exactly, elastic shear strain  $F_{21}^e$ ) alone or with  $\tau_{32}$  does not contribute to the instability condition; but  $\tau_{21}$  contributes when two other stresses,  $\tau_{31}$  and  $\tau_{32}$ , are applied simultaneously, and, depending on signs of all shear stresses,  $\tau_{21}$  may promote or suppress tetragonal instability.

*Shear stress-strain curves and shear lattice instability.*—typical shear-stress–deformation-gradient ( $\tau_{31}$ – $F_{31}$ ) curves (Fig. S3 [27]), shear instability starts at the maximum shear stress. This instability does not lead to Si II but rather to possible amorphization or hexagonal diamond Si IV (which is beyond our present focus).

Under an initial (before shear) hydrostatic compression, the shear instability at an infinitesimal shear starts at 72 GPa, i.e., below the tetragonal mode of lattice instability. This may explain amorphization in nanocrystalline Si I under increasing pressure when Si II PT is kinetically suppressed [44]. Amorphization may be caused by virtual melting [45] after crossing the metastable continuation of the melting line, as the melting temperature for Si reduces with pressure.

*Effect of shear stresses on tetragonal instability.*— $\sigma_3$  –  $E_3$  curves were obtained for different fixed shears, along the path in the ( $F_1 = F_2$ ,  $F_3$ ) plane corresponding to  $\sigma_1 = \sigma_2$  before shear. The instability stress (Fig. S4) is determined as the local maximum of  $|\sigma_3|$  (Fig. 2). While during shear  $\sigma_1 \neq \sigma_2$ , but their sum  $\sigma_1 + \sigma_2$  practically does not change. That is why curves in Fig. S4 are given for the fixed values of  $(\sigma_1 + \sigma_2)/2$ .

Absolute and relative deviations between the actual instability stress  $\sigma_3$  and  $\sigma_3^{an}$  based on the analytical prediction (4) are small (Figs. S5 and S6) and can be neglected. Thus, the tetragonal lattice instability under the action of all six components of the stress tensor is described by the critical value of the modified transformation work [Eq. (4)], which (a) is linear in normal stresses, depends on  $\sigma_1 + \sigma_2$ , and has only two adjustable coefficients ( $b_1$  and  $b_3$ ), (b) is independent of  $\sigma_1 - \sigma_2$  and shear stress  $\tau_{21}$  acting alone or with one more shear stress, and (c) contains a geometric nonlinear term describing the contribution of all shear stresses without any additional adjustable parameters.

In summary, we augmented standard  $T$  –  $P$  diagrams with criteria for structural and electronic instabilities (PTs) under a general applied stress tensor, providing guidance for more accessible processing routes for new or known high-pressure phases with novel properties. Our comprehensive DFT study of the PT between semiconducting Si I and metallic Si II under general applied stresses investigated stress-strain curves, elastic lattice instabilities, and regions of metallization. Metallization occurs deeply in the region of stability of Si I and is not caused by Si I  $\rightarrow$  Si II PT. Deformed Si I becomes metallic, and the effect of

nonhydrostatic stresses is very strong. The hydrostatic PT pressure is  $\sim 21$  times larger than for uniaxial loading. Such a strong nonhydrostatic stress effect at least partially explains the significant difference between the observed PT pressure (9–12 GPa) and the instability pressure of 75.81 GPa and the scatter in measured data under quasi-hydrostatic conditions.

Our key result is that Si I  $\rightarrow$  Si II PT is given by a critical value of the modified transformation work [Eq. (4)]. For a general stress tensor (six independent variables), the PT criterion has just two parameters. Hence, PT criterion can be determined by just two DFT calculations versus applied stress.

These results are significant for creating new, more practical, and economical processing routes for discovery and stabilizing materials with novel properties. While comparison of the Gibbs free energy minima defines thermodynamic equilibrium (possibly unachievable in practice), we suggest the competition of instabilities to serve for phase selection. Critically, this approach enables ways to reduce PT pressure due to nonhydrostatic stresses by an order of magnitude or more [5,13–15]. They can also be used for quantitative studies of the influence of crystal defects on phase transitions [17,18] and quantitatively rationalize connections between PT conditions for ideal and real (defective) crystals.

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\*zarkev@ameslab.gov

†haochen@iastate.edu

‡vlevitas@iastate.edu

§ddj@iastate.edu, ddj@ameslab.gov

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